based on it, are the envy of the greater part of mankind, and the focus of most of their dreams and much of their endeavour. This is an outcome I certainly did not foresee, either on my *Guardian* editorial perch, or in my Ash Vale barrack-hut.

Again, at the end of *The Thirties* a curtain falls. The so long dreaded war has begun, the assumption being that the last act of our tragedy is upon us, and that when it has been played out the stage will be darkened and the audience depart. It never so much as occurred to me that anything would be salvaged; with a kind of exaltation, which reached its height going about the streets of London in the blitz, sometimes in the company of Graham Greene, a kindred spirit, I felt I was present at the last bonfire of the last remains of our derelict civilisation. Nor at the war's end, when the Nazis were defeated, and the church bells rang out, not to proclaim an invasion, but to celebrate a victory, did I suppose for a moment that the past as we had known it could ever be reconstructed. The rubble of Berlin, piled in strange heaps like a landscape in the moon, represented, as I thought, an irretrievable extinction; as the people groping about in the rubble, constructing out of it little caves for themselves, exchanging their bodies for cigarettes and tins of Spam, or just yielding them before the rough importunities of their liberators from the east, were troglodytes fated never to emerge from their twilight. Yet emerge they did, to sit in the sunshine consuming huge beakers of hot chocolate *mit schlag.* From the rubble there sprouted a new city, many mansions,

mansions of chromium and glass. Was it really a city ? Or just an ingenious arrangement of lights ? Even now I am not quite sure.

Be that as it may, it is an indubitable fact that when the dust and smoke of war finally cleared, there unmistakably were the props and players whose disappearance for ever I had taken for granted—a House of Commons soon restored to Honourable Members; black coats and umbrellas making their way down Whitehall as though Hitler had never existed; the Athenaeum furbished up, *The Times* coming out, even the *Almanack de Gotha*